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"THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD" AS A PHILOSOPHIC TALE: A GENERIC APPROACH *

In an attempt to describe the notorious "singularity" of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Ralph M. Wardle accounts for the reader's puzzlement in the following terms:

> It can be read as idyllic or ironic, it can be regarded as representative of the sentimental novel or of the trend away from such fiction; it has meant many things to many readers, and future generations may regard it in varying or in wholly different lights. In effect it is an anomaly like its author and is therefore, in one respect, his most typical work.[1]

This "anomaly" is that of a narrative which cannot be refered to any cleary defined generic category. A case night be made, of course, for *The Vicar* as a novel of sentiment, with the help of such elements as the love intrigue between Sophia and Burchell, the contrast between the Vicar's helplessness and Burchell's role as silent protector and final rescuer, the wishful fantasy of the honeysuckle bank and of rural happiness. But it also points to the later development of the Gothic novel, with the "virtute in distress" theme, between Richardson's pathos and moralizing concern and De Sade's forceful accumulation of cruelty and violence. Both genres belong to the tradition of the romance, which is also present in the eulogy of country life in the fields and by the fire side and seems to point to an idyll in another Auburn, loveliest village of the plain. "Away from such fiction", as Wardle would say, is the *Bildungsroman* which seems to start in Chapter 3 with George, the Vicar's son, taking his leave from his father in order to see the world. When we meet him

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* This paper was presented by the author at the meeting of the Department of English Literature of the Institute of English Studies, University of Łódź, Poland, on 27th October 1987.

[1] R. M. Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith*, Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1957, p. 171.

again much later in Chapter 20, the account he gives of his adventures or rather misfortunes, corresponds to yet another narrative pattern, that of the picaresque with its broken episodic structure, the characteristic master-and-servant relationship and the lack of real progress and social success. When the Vicar himself leaves his fire-side to go in search of his lost child—the hapless Olivia—the book seems to turn into an allegorical journey leading to self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment, to wisdom and heavenly bliss substituted for worldly prudence, in the vein of the *Pilgrim's Progess* and other "voyages of the soul" of the homiletic tradition. As for the overall structure or, debatably, lack of structure of *The Vicar*, with its succession of short chapters illustrating a lesson, with the interpolated poems of the first half of the book and the several essays and sermons inserted into the second part, it seems to suggest a succession of moral fables or periodical essays in the Spectatorial tradition.

This overabundance of generic references seems to be at the core of the anomaly. *The Vicar of Wakefield* can be read as a sentimental novel, as a Gothic romance, as an idyll or another version of the pastoral, as a novel of formation, as a picaresque narrative, as a spiritual allegory, as a collection of essays and apologues. Symptomatically, it includes a ballad (Chap. 8), an elegy (Chap. 17), a lyric (Chap. 24), a fable in prose (Chap. 13), a short novella (Chap. 23), a dissertation on politics (Chap. 19), another one on prison reform (Chap. 27), and a sermon (Chap. 29). This embarrassing wealth calls for an examination of the status of this kind of narrative in the general landscape of eighteenth-century prose fiction, to see how these many generic associations—implied or explicitly offered—can guide rather than blur the reading process. And this investigation might throw some light on the true nature of this "fanciful performance", to use Johnson's phrase, of "this very sigular tale" according to the *Monthly Review* or "very singular novel" according to the *Critical Review* (both in 1766)—a singularity which seems to be the paradoxical result of generic multiplicity.

I

If *The Vicar of Wakefield* had been as 'singular', that is, unique of its kind, as the early reviewers said, it could hardly be read, let alone understood: it would not make sense. But the title-page offers an interesting clue, a generic hint which shows where we should look for an organizing principle. *The Vicar*, the title-page says, is "a tale supposed to be written by himself"—a curiously reflexive phrase in which a title becomes its own author, the circularity of autographical involution expressed in a neat linguistic paradox. Let's begin at the beginning then with this autogenous denomination.

What is a "tale"? Diderot suggests an answer by opposition in a short

piece of fiction in dialogue form entitled, characteristically, *Ceci n'est pas un conte*, "This is not a tale":

> When one starts telling a tale to someone who listens to it, and if the tale proves to be somewhat long, the teller is usually interrupted by his listener. This is the reason why I have introduced into the following tale, which is not a tale, or which is not a good tale, if you prefer, a character who might play the part of the reader; and here I begin.[2]

The reason why Diderot maintains that his story is not a (good) tale appears very soon: it deals with real persons and it pretends to tell genuine anecdotes. As opposed to this stress on authenticity, a (good) tale is explicitly fictional, improbable and self-referential. The generic improbability of the tale is best illustrated in its affinity with the marvellous and the exotic; its self-referentiality draws attention to its artificiality, as the title-page of *The Vicar* does—on its structure rather than its contents.

Brevity is another basic feature of a tale. This apparently quantitative feature is less arbitrary than it may seem, being a direct consequence of a third characteristic of the tale: its oral nature. A tale is supposed to be told by a teller to a listener—as Diderot reminds us pointing to the obvious—or an audience, which implies the physical presence of teller and listener and the limited duration of what can be told and listened to at one sitting or telling. The archetype here could be the bedtime story. Of course this oral aspect of tales which is present in the etymology (as in the French 'conte'), and which is so prominent in Diderot's tale in dialogue form, may be an imitation of orality, a fictitious, mimetic orality when the tale is written instead of being spoken, read and not listened to. Characteristically, Diderot's 'listener' becomes a 'reader' within the same short introductory poragraph quoted above. It should also be noted that brevity and oral utterance suggest an unsophisticated audience, unable either to read or to give sustained attention to what it is supposed to listen to: children in particular, in the case of bedtime stories or fairy tales.

This leads to a fourth characteristic: simplicity. The notion can be illustrated in many aspects of the tale: simplicity of the structural framework, which accounts for the fact that folk-tales have provided case-studies for narratological analyses from the early days of Wladimir Propp to the later developments of structuralism, simplicity of the language, lack of sophistication in all respects with a tendency to duplication and repetition in the grammar of discourse, a rudimentary psycholo-

[2] D. Diderot, Ceci n'est pas un conte (1773), in *Oeuvres*, André Billy ed., Paris 1951, p. 183 : "Lorsqu'on fait un conte, à quelqu'un qui l'écoute, et pour peu que le contre dure, il est rare que le conteur ne soit pas interompu quelquefois pas son auditeur. Voilà pourquoi j'ai introduit dans le récit qu'on va lire, et qui n'est pas un conte, ou qui est un mauvais conte, si vous vous en doutez, un personnage qui fasse à peu près le rôle du lecteur; et je commence."

gical make-up, and a certain childishness of characters even when they are supposed to be adults with responsibilities.

Finally, a tale has a lesson, and an explicit one. It is pedagogic and utilitarian. The lesson can be very practical, worldly, even ethically objectionable or spiritual and religious, but a tale without a moral would not be a tale. "And what do you conclude from this?", asks Diderot's listener, who then learns a rather homely truth: "Il faut avouer qu'il y a des hommes bien bons, et des femmes bien méchantes". A tale tells the truth or a truth beyond the improbability of its fiction. Diderot's title, *This is not a tale*, is a paradoxical disclaimer which points to the tale-teller's function as a truth-teller.

A tale then can be defined as a short piece of improbable fiction made of simple elements, provided with an explicit moral purpose, and imitating oral utterance. If this definition is valid, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is undoubtedly true to its subtitle. It is short by the standards of most eighteenthcentury novels, its fictional world is both familiar and improbable, the formal mimetics of oral discourse are present in the homodiegetic, first-person, confessional narration and also in the numerous embedded narratives; its moral purpose is stated from the outset in the very serious 'Advertisement' (signed 'Oliver Goldsmith') with which the book opens. Though one of the critical commonplaces about *The Vicar* is its ambivalence, its elemental simplicity can be shown in several respects: in Dr. Primrose's ingenuousness—some would say ineptitude—as a responsible person, or in the organization or lack of organization of the plot which mainly relies on parataxis and duplication.

II

The same could be said, more or less, of Voltaire's *Candide*, or Johnson's *Rasselas*, both published in 1759. If one considers that *The Vicar*, though published later (1766), was written in 1760—62, in the wake of the success of *Rasselas*, the near contemporaneity of the three books seems to suggest even closer generic relationships, as if a specifically eighteenth-century kind of short fiction had suddenly found its best expression at the turn of the sixties.

Of the five criteria enumerated above, three are structural: self-conscious fictionality, brevity and formal mimetics of orality. The fourth feature, simplicity, cannot be ascribed to one field of analysis in particular. The fifth stands out as being intentional or "conative', to use Roman Jakobson's term. Percisely because of its relative autonomy, the moral criterion can become virtually non-existent, mere lip-service paid to the duty to teach as well as to please which the tale shares with the rest of fiction, as so many eighteenth-century prefaces state more or less hypocritically. No tale can do without a moral or the pretense of a specific

lessen, which goes much beyond the required *dulce et utile* of literature in general. In a letter dated 1723, written at the time of the great popularity of the oriental tale introduced into literature by the extremely influential translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Alexander Pope wrote: "I have long had an inclination to tell a fairy tale, the more wild and exotic the better [...] (It) will take in all the variety and luxuriancy of description you will, provided there be an apparent moral to it" [3]. In place of this spurious addition or decoy, the moral lesson can be given prominence at the other end of the spectrum, so as to make the *dulce* subservient to the *utile*, itself turning out to be a mere gilding of the didactic pill. This foregrounding of the intention inverts the hierarchy of criteria and establishes the moral purpose as the original and final feature of the narrative. This is unmistakable in the pompous rhetoric of the first paragraph of *Rasselas*, "Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy..." and also, in the stern oratory of Goldsmith's 'Advertisement' prefixed to *The Vicar*. An unsigned notice in the *Annual Register* reviewing *Rasselas* stressed that point in 1759:

> The instruction which is found in most works of this kind, when they convey any instruction at all, is not the predominant part, but arises accidentally in the course of a story planned only to please. [This is strikingly close to Pope's statement just quoted]. But in this novel the moral is the principal object, and the story is a mere vehicle to convey the instruction.[4]

It becomes clear that the structural features of the tale made it the ideal "vehicle to convey instruction". A lesson is more efficient, if one is to believe the practice of pedagogues and moralists of all times and places, if it is ilustrated by means of a short tale, a simple story, with the authority of the living presence of the teller. In its generic definition, a tale is didactic in a way the novel can never be didactic, if by 'novel' one referes to the classical, nineteenth-century realistic novel. A 'philosophic novel' is often another name for a philosophic tale: for instance, Albert Camus' *The Outsider* or *The Fall*, with their remarkable brevity, as opposed to the three volumes of Sartre's *The Paths to Freedom*. A novel of ideas can be more successful than Sartre's existentialist fiction or Doris Lessing's 'fluid puddings', to use the term with which Henry James condemned, rather unjustly, such novels as *Middlemarch*. For example, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* seems to be successful in spite of its ideas, just as a good historical novel is good as fiction, not as a historical narrative. A novel of ideas can hardly be infused by a clearly circumscribed moral lesson but if one tried to dissociate the moral standpoint from

[3] Letter to Judith Cowper, 26 September 1723; quoted in G. Tillotson, *Rasselas and the "Persian Tales"*, [in:] *Essays in Criticism and Research*, Cambridge 1942, p. 112. My italics.

[4] Quoted in J. T. Boulton, ed., *Johnson. The Critical Heritage*, London 1971, p. 147.

the fiction in *Rasselas*, of for that matter in *The Vicar*, the fiction itself would lose its point.

The structural affinity between the tale and didacticism found its best expression in the eighteenth-century didactic or philosophic tale, in which the potentialities of a very popular narrative form were made to serve the pedagogical urge of the Age of Enlightenment. The form was considered as typically French, with the fairy tales of Charles Perrault or Mme d'Aulnoy, or the *Thousand and One Nights* which made their way into England through the French version of Antoine Galland.[5] The 'philosophers' used the tale extensively: Montesquieu in his *Persian Letters*—later imitated by Goldsmith in his own *Chinese Letters*—Diderot in many sorts and the author of tales, said in a preface in 1760: "Les contes de *tes Philosophiques*. As the Comte de Caylus, himself a philosopher of sorts and the author of tales, said in a preface in 1760: "Les contes de Fées ont été long-temps à la mode, et dans ma jeunesse on ne lisait guères que cela dans le monde".[6] In England, the extraordinary development of the periodical press under Queen Anne provided authors and essay writers with a convenient format for tales (oriental or more generally allegorical) ideally suited to the purpose of popular education of the Spectatorial tradition. But each of the four books of *Gulliver's Travels* can be considered as a philosophic tale in its own right; the same can be said of the "interpolated tales" to be found in Fielding's or Smollett's novels and Johnson's and Goldsmith's own periodical essays in the fifties and sixties which revived the tradition. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically didactic in the oriental tale: as it happened, it was more often satiric or erotic rather than philosophical. But the 'Orient'—the highly conventional East of the oriental tale—provided a ready-made allegorical setting for a tale with a purpose, as in *Candide* or *Rasselas*. And the pastoral setting of Goldsmith's tale of country life with its nostalgic suggestion of a fast disappearing manorial England proves to be no less exotic than Johnson's very artificial and literary Abyssinia.

III

If the philosophic tale with such remarkable achievements as *Candide*, *Rasselas*, and *The Vicar*, can be considered as typical of the Age of Enlightenment, its specificity in contrasted reference to contemporary fiction remains to be examined. Much of the difficulty we may have in the proper assessment of the generic nature of the philosophic tale is the result of presuppositions which correspond to the overwhelming predominance of the novel in its canonical nineteenth-century form. But the flui-

[5] See for egzample J. Barchillon, *Uses of the Fairy Tale in the Eighteenth Century*, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century", 1963, XXIV, p. 111—138.

[6] Quoted in J. Barchillon, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

dity of fictional forms was great in the eighteenth century; there was more affinity and overlapping between the various forms of prose fiction and, as a consequence, greater freedom of structure. As we have seen above, both *Rasselas* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* could be referred to as 'novels' by contemporaries in the *Annual Register* and the *Critical Review;* Voltaire did not bother to make a strict distinction between 'romans et contes philosophiques'. Our generic categories have changed and this evolution of generic conventions modifies our 'horizon of meaning', our ability as readers to make sense of generic associations which have become unfamiliar.[7]

The debate on the value of prose fiction and its generic implications in the eighteenth century opposed 'romance' to the 'novel' Fielding's new 'species of writing' as he says in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* on the fundamental aesthetic and also moral question of the imitation of nature. If the nature to be imitated is the world around us, if "everything is copied from the book of nature"—Fielding again—including vice and injustice and the blotches on the human face divine, then 'realism' prevails: this is what defines the novel as probable: it has life and it is not necessarily moral. Smollett offers this definition of the novel in a well-known passage from the Preface to *Ferdinand Count Fathom* which ignores the moral duty to teach:

> A Novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of a uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient.

But if 'nature' means God's nature as described, for example, in Pope's *Essay on Man*, implying a vindication of the ways of God to man, then fiction has every right to be improbable without being untrue or unfaithful to a moral reality of a higher order. The traditional romance with its closed ending in harmony and integration, imitates God's inclusive point of view; 'poetic justice' becomes another word for God's justice and divine retribution beyond death, as opposed to the injustice of life and the disappointments of our individual limited existence. Thus, the romance mode of fiction can point to a higher moral without being existentially probable and the novel is likely to be all too probable without being morally acceptable.

It appears then that the didactic tale is on the same side as the romance on the fictional spectrum, away from the novel. Fanny Burney commented upon the demoralizing moral lesson of *Rasselas* in revealing terms:

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[7] See A. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature. The Theory of Genres and Modes*, Oxford 1982, p. 260: "We have to construct an impression of the anterior state of literature — of the genres from which the original work took its departure."

> Oh, how dreadful, how terrible it is to be told by a man of his genius and knowledge, in so affectingly probable a manner, that true, real happiness is ever unattainable in this world.[8]

The allegorization of fiction, if one may be allowed to use this awkward phrase, which the improbability and self-consciousness of the tale make possible, turns it into an apt vehicle for moral or eternal truths. In that sense the tale can be as inescapably convincing as a novel, but at another, spiritual level of experience. In Johnson's words: "Imitations produce pain and pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities [the realistic fallacy of the novel, shall we say], but because they bring realities to the mind [the eternal truths of the soul]".[9] Predictably, Johnson considered the new species of writing, the *nouveau roman* of his age, to be more dangerous than romance with all its wishful fantasies. The fourth *Rambler* is where he expresses this unconventional view.[10] In the novel, the illusion of reality is so powerful that even vice may become amiable and the realist (Defoe rather than Fielding of course, but also Richardson and Smollett to a lesser degree) makes every effort to erase all self-referential elements from his narration, as if it were life itself, unmediated, not an artificial construct, a story *told*. The distanciation of romance makes it safer than the fascinating familiarity of the novel.

Because of distanciation, the romance avoids the confusion between the real and the imaginary. Johnson opposed the "heroic romance" with its princes, giants, and knights, with "its personages in deserts" or "in imaginary castles", to the "comic romance" ('comic' in the sense of 'low' as applied to the novel, of course). He maintains that in the romance the action is so far-fetched and "remote from all that passes among men, that the reader is in very little danger of making any applications to himself". This remote action is, strictly speaking, exotic and as such, potentially allegorical in a fictional presentation of real (moral, spiritual) problems. Admittedly, this is not what the "romances formerly written" did, Johnson says, but it is precisely what the modern novel, the comic romance, can never do.

What is needed then is a certain redistribution of generic components, in order to associate the seriousness of purpose in reference to the moral man which only romance-like allegory can provide, with the familiarity of the novel, which enables the reader to "make applications to himself": a combination of allegorical distanciation and emotional immediacy, in order "to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defence, and to increase prudence without impairing virtue".

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[8] Quoted in F. M. Keener, *The Chain of Becoming*, New York 1983, p. 7.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[10] See the excellent discussion of this *locus classicus* in F. M. Keener's book mentioned above, Chap. 1: "The Philosophical Tale and the Novel."

Nine years later Johnson himself applied his programmatic formula in *Rasselas* with great success and, according to Fanny Burney, with remarkable efficiency. And the same formula is an apt description of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and of *Candide*, with due allowance given to the ironic stance. The personal relationships between Johnson and Goldsmith could lead us to expect a mutual debate on the lures of fiction, or on the proper use of romance or the novel. But Goldsmith dismissed fiction in bulk as "delusive" and "deceitful" and refused the distinctions of the *Rambler*, as this excerpt from a letter to his brother about his son's education shows:

> Above all things let him never touch a romance, or novel, those paint beauty in colours more charming than nature, and describe happiness that man never tastes. How delusive, how destructive therefore are those pictures of consummate bliss, they teach the youthful mind to sigh after beauty and happiness which never existed, to despise the little good which fortune has mixed in our cup, by expecting more than she ever gave.[11]

But there is a passage in one of the *Chinese Letters*, written in 1760, in which Goldsmith seems to relent: though Johnson is not mentioned by name, it reads like a vindication of the philosophic tale, between the triumph of *Rasselas* and Goldsmith's own experiment in *The Vicar:*

> To be able to inculcate virtue by so leaky a vehicle [meaning a romance], the author must be a philosopher of the first rank. But in our age, we can find but few first rate philosophers.[12]

And a few textual echoes confirm the link between *Rasselas* and *The Vicar*. From the point of view of generic analysis, both narratives establish that the authenticity of the didactic or philosophic tale lies in its seriousness of purpose, in the profundity of the moral or spiritual lesson, not in the fantasy-like commonplaces, unrealistic abstractions and stereotyped narrative situations used to make this moral lesson "affectingly probable". There is no contradiction between this didactic use of wishful thinking as "vehicle" and the inevitable condemnation of the lures of imagination and wishful fantasies as part of a more general indictment of the vanity of human wishes, self-deceit, and lack of awareness—a theme that is common to *Candide, Rasselas* and *The Vicar*, as the first step towards self-knowledge and humility.

IV

The real question about the value of *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a philosophic tale is then whether its author was "a philosopher of the first

[11] Quoted in Sven Bäckman, *This Singular Tale: A Study of the Vicar of Wakefield and its Literary Background*, Lund 1971, p. 24.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

rank". The suggestion of the improvident, extravagant, vain and gullible Goldsmith as a first rate philosopher is incongruous, but the seriousness of purpose of *The Vicar,* as expressed in the 'Advertisement', is unmistakable. This contradiction is at the core of the well-known ambivalence of the narrative. Goldsmith seems to have enjoyed the "leaky vehicle" of his fiction more than he was ready to confess.

The romance elements of a philosophic tale are meant to serve a higher purpose, as we have seen. In *Rasselas,* Nekayah is kidnapped and kept in bondage by a desert prince and in *The Vicar* Olivia and Sophia suffer the same fate in the hands of a rakish knight. But these sensational episodes are extreme examples of man's unhappiness; they are meant to be read as part of the moral lesson which is explicitly hostile to the sham values of the romance world and to all uncritical preconceptions. At the beginning of their initiation into wisdom, Primrose, Rasselas and Candide entertain dogmatic ideas and rather smug views about the world and their own importance in it: such is Pangloss' Leibnitzian optimism carried to absurd extremes or Resselas' youthful self-confidence and distrust of the others' experience or Primrose's complacency about his "little republic", his authority as a husband and a father, and his hobby--horse monogamy. In that respect all three can be considered as modern versions of Don Quixote. Don Quixote is present in each of us all, Johnson says in the second *Rambler,* pointing to the dramatic lock of self -knowledge and clear-sightedness which endangers our lives, "vitiated by the luxurious indulgence of hope".

It is precisely this indulgence of hope which Goldsmith seems to have preferred to the harsh realities of a solitary and penurious existence. Goldsmith, rather than his brother's son, was in need of the moral lesson of his own philosophic tale. The lures of the romance form triumph at the end of *The Vicar,* somehow associated with the victory of spiritual awareness: a clear case of wishful fantasy. The often discussed conclusion of *Rasselas* "concludes nothing": it ends on a subdued, negative note, the sad music of philosophic humility. But in *The Vicar,* we are taken back to wealth and happiness restored, to the fire-side and the harmonious family circle of the beginning, to tales twice-told and the edenic refuge of the rural idyll. Goldsmith's Vicar is reluctant to turn away from the illusions Rasselas learns to deride and reject. True, his womenfolk abandon their dreams of court life just as Pekuah says in *Rasselas:* "I will no more imagine myself the Queen of Abyssinia". But Nekayah adds: "And I will not allow myself any more to play the shepherdess in my waking dreams". This apparently was too harsh for Goldsmith to accept. He preferred to be less wise than he preached and to write an awkwardly unphilosophical philosophic tale rather than abandon his indulgence of hope, his waking dreams and his fond memories of Sweet Auburn and childhood lost.

„PLEBAN Z WAKEFIELDU" JAKO POWIASTKA FILOZOFICZNA ANALIZA GATUNKOWA*

STRESZCZENIE

Pleban z Wakefieldu Olivera Goldsmitha uważany jest za anomalię w dziedzinie beletrystyki osiemnastowiecznej i nie da się jako całość przyporządkować ówcześnie istniejącym gatunkom literackim, gdyż zawiera elementy i motywy powieści sentymentalnej, gotyckiej, *Bildungstroman*, pikareski, alegorycznej podróży ku samopoznaniu itp. Może być odczytywany jako idylla lub ironia; zawiera wiersze, eseje, kazania; przypomina moralne opowiastki „Spectatora".

Autor rozprawy bierze za punkt wyjścia i klucz do ustalenia zamiaru artystycznego Goldsmitha dziwny pełny tytuł jego utworu: *Pleban z Wakefieldu — opowieść domniemanie napisana przez niego samego*. Opiera się również na opisie *opowieści-tale-conte* w *Ceci n'est pas un conte* Diderota oraz na czasie powstania *Plebana* wkrótce po ukazaniu się romansów lub powiastek filozoficznych *Kandyd* Woltera i *Rasselas* Johnsona (1759). Z wszystkich tych danych wynika, że Goldsmith zamierzał napisać romans filozoficzny przeniesiony na tło angielskie.

Tezę tę autor rozprawy uzasadnia również wewnętrznymi cechami utworu. Jedna z nich — dydaktyzm — przyjęty wówczas w baśniach i „listach" orientalnych oraz krótkich romansach nie należała do ówczesnej powieści angielskiej — *novel* — co potwierdzają wypowiedzi ówczesnych pisarzy i krytyków.

Rozprawa kończy się omówieniem wartości utworu Goldsmitha jako opowieści filozoficznej. Zamierzeniom nie sprostał intelekt pisarza, który stanowczo nie był filozofem. Dlatego *Pleban z Wakefieldu* zawiera sprzeczności w samej swej istocie. Wydaje się, że pisząc rodzaj romansu Goldsmith znalazł w nim więcej przyjemności niż chciał się do tego przyznać, potępiając romanse w liście do brata. Zamierzając zaś przedstawić główną postać jako Don Kichota uleczonego z naiwności i złudzeń, wpadł sam w pułapkę nadmiernego optymizmu nadziei i zakończył książkę happy endem. Dlatego *Pleban z Wakefieldu* jest niezgrabną niefilozoficzną powiastką filozoficzną.

Witold Ostrowski

* Niniejsza rozprawa została przedstawiona przez autora na zebraniu naukowym Zakładu Literatury Angielskiej w Instytucie Filologii Angielskiej Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 27 października 1987 r.